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ABSTRACT

An ex post facto study examined third grade students' achievement test scores both before and after the adoption of a literature-based basal reading text. The experimental groups consisted of five third grade classes at Terre Town Elementary School (Indiana) for each of the years 1988 through 1993. Mean scores were plotted and data were visually interpreted to yield the study's results. Results indicated that the use of literature-based basal had little effect on reading, language, and total battery ISTEP (Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress) scores of the students. (Contains five tables of data and seven references.) (CR)

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ED 420 060

A Literature-Based Basal Reader's Effects on Student Achievement

An Evaluation of Literature-Based Basal Textbook Adoption at Terre Town Elementary

by: Anne Burk

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CS 216 349

Abstract

This article looks at an ex post facto study of third grade students' achievement test scores both before and after the adoption of a literature-based basal reading text. Mean scores were plotted and the data was visually interpreted to yield the study's results. The use of a literature-based basal had little effect on the reading, language, and total battery ISTEP scores of the students.

Background of the Problem

Prior to 1991, language arts textbooks adopted by the Vigo County School Corporation and utilized at Terre Town Elementary, were the skills-based, vocabulary-controlled texts traditionally found in most public schools nationwide. In the late 1980's, elementary schools within the district were expected to adopt a whole language view or philosophy in their Language Arts instruction. Great controversy ensued and the direction of reading, language, writing, and spelling instruction fanned into a multitude of instructional techniques and strategies. Language arts instruction at Terre Town Elementary followed the same convoluted course.

The textbook adoption schedule called for the adoption of a new language arts texts in 1991. Although the whole language philosophy calls for the use of tradebooks and the elimination of traditional

textbooks, the Vigo County School Corporation received great opposition to the total elimination of language arts textbooks. Reutzel and Larsen (1995) found that over 90% of schools use basals for reading instruction because of the influence of state and district policies favoring the use of textbooks over tradebooks. The resulting choices for 1991 adoption became the literature-based Houghton-Mifflin reading series, . In the push to incorporate the whole language view, individual teachers were given the option of choosing sets of tradebooks instead of the traditional workbooks that accompanied the series. Teachers were also encouraged to create their own spelling lists relevant to the literature they used in class and to use the English text as a resource only.

Literature-based basals, referred to as children's literature anthologies, contain whole stories or excerpts from children's novels taken from tradebooks. In contrast, the skills-based reading texts of the 1940's through the 1980's, contained stories written by publishers' in-house authors. These stories utilized controlled vocabulary and were designed to teach specific skills.

In his historical research, Luke (1987), stated that the basals developed in the 1940's replaced the fables and tales of the 19th century with controlled texts about modern life in an industrial democracy. The linguistically simplistic structure of these early basals was fabricated solely to teach the skills and habits of reading while the literary content provided accessible childhood experiences which were

considered universal. Luke (1987), reports the theory behind these highly controlled, simplistic texts was that children should start reading at a simplistic level and progress incrementally toward mature prose.

McCarthey et al (1994), stated the skill-based basals contained insipid stories which lacked plot and character development, were of low-interest to students, and lacked predictability features making them less engaging to children. Luke (1987) concurs with McCarthey et al (1994) in his finding that the scientific design of the early basal readers may have undermined efforts to produce meaningful and relevant textbooks.

Literature-based basal textbooks include stories which are more complex in character and plot development. These "real" stories contain more colloquial and idiomatic phrases, more predictability features, and often focus on illustrations. These characteristics require a greater level of reader interpretation, therefore, improving reading skills (McCarthey et al, 1994).

Teacher attitudes about basal reading programs and texts have been researched and the findings are somewhat ambiguous. Cloud-Silvia and Sadoski (1991) found that elementary teachers do not rely solely on basal reading programs to determine their reading teaching methods. Furthermore, they found that supplementation to any basal program was widespread among teachers. Baumann and Heubach (1996) found that

basal reading programs do not deskill teachers. Their results found that; a) teachers are discriminating consumers of instructional materials, b) most teachers view a basal program only as an available instructional tool, and c) most teachers do not relinquish control to materials. These results caused Baumann and Heubach (1996) to conclude that basal materials empower teachers by providing instructional suggestions to draw from, adapt, or extend. Cloud-Silvia and Sadoski (1991) concluded that teachers, free of administrative constraints, would still chose to use basals, although less frequently and with more flexibility. In their study of the new literature-based basals, McCarthey et al (1994) concur with Baumann and Heubach (1996), stating that teachers see the new basals as enhanced resources whose value is dependent upon how they are used.

The research on children's attitudes about basal textbooks suggests that learners see the value of any basal as purely educational. Cairney (1988) reported that the children in his study did not believe comprehension and meaning were of importance when reading basals. The same children also did not find the stories in basals to be intrinsically interesting. Children view basals as an end in themselves because of the material they provide, how the teachers use basals, and a combination of both concluded Cairney (1988).

In Sosniak's 1990 study, children were engaged in the process of reading text selection. The children ranked highest the readers that

included mystery stories and plays. They also reported stories containing humor, unpredictability, and action, as well as "good" artwork, were all characteristics found in a good reading text. Children reported that they disliked stories about children like themselves, skills exercises, and comprehension questions in a reader. Sosniak (1990) concluded that although children agreed on their favorite elements of a basal reader, they do not share a comprehensive view about the quality of basals. McCarthey et al (1994) contradicted Sosniak (1990), reporting that the students in their study found the new literature-based basals to be more engaging based on the texts' predictability features and illustrations.

If the research tells us that teachers will continue to teach in the same manner regardless of the type of basal program utilized in their school, then we can expect no improvement of test scores after the introduction of a literature-based basal program. A small improvement might be expected based on the research findings stating that children reported the literature-based texts to be more engaging, thus encouraging them to become more involved in the development of their language arts skills. If instruction does not change even though student attitudes move in a more positive direction after the adoption of a literature-based basal program at Terre Town Elementary, then no significant improvement in test scores will occur in the language arts areas.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of the switch to a literature-based basal reading program from a traditional skills-based, controlled-vocabulary basal program at Terre Town Elementary. The switch to the literature-based basal occurred district-wide at the elementary level in the Vigo County School Corporation in 1991.

The improvement of reading and language skills of elementary students is a dilemma that has long plagued educators. Through what programs and by which means can public schools effectively improve these skills in young learners? A brief glance at the history of Language Arts instruction in the United States suggests a myriad of programs, techniques, and philosophies have been implemented and tried.

Can the use of literature-based basal reading programs improve the reading and language skills of students? The adoption of Houghton-Mifflin's literature-based reading series Turtles Like to Sleep In in 1991 by the Vigo County School Corporation represented a move towards a whole language approach in language arts instruction. Would the use of a literature-based basal improve Terre Town students' reading and language skills as evidenced through test scores?

Specifically, the following hypothesis was investigated in this

study:

Students taught in a literature-based basal reading program achieve no significantly higher test scores than students taught in a skills-based basal program.

Methodology

The experimental groups in this ex post facto study consisted of five third grade classes at Terre Town Elementary for each of the years 1988 through 1993. This available sample was considered representative of the population for each of the six years studied because their mean intelligence quotient ranged between 99 and 103 (Table 1). The interval estimate would predict that the population mean was between 97 and 103, making the groups representative with intelligence quotient scores that fell within the population parameters.

The 1988, 1989, and 1990 third grade classes all utilized a skills-based, vocabulary-controlled basal textbook for Language Arts instruction. In 1991, a literature-based basal text was adopted by the district and it became the basis of Language Arts instruction for the third grade classes of 1991, 1992, and 1993. It is important to note that the same five teachers taught third grade for all six years of this study.

In March of 1988 through 1993, the Indiana Statewide Testing for

Educational Progress (ISTEP) test was administered to each of the third grade classes in the sample. Mean normal curve equivalents for the reading total, the language total, and the total battery were obtained for each class. It was determined that means in each of these areas should be investigated because of the bearing reading skills would have on skills necessary to completing the language section as well as the total battery. The weighted mean was then determined for the entire third grade for each of the years 1988-1993 (Table 2). The weighted means were then plotted in three separate graphs (Tables 3-5) and examined visually for significance.

Results

The results of the reading, language, and total battery scores for the three sets of data are as follows:

Study 1: ISTEP scores in reading achievement showed no significant improvement during the years 1988 -1993. The means fluctuated with no particular trend or pattern visible. Mean scores ranged from 54.3 in 1992 to 60.8 in 1993. The adoption of a literature-based basal text in 1991 did not affect the fluctuating nature of the means. The magnitude of the fluctuation of scores after 1991 increased greatly (Table 3).

Study 2: ISTEP scores in language achievement showed no significant improvement during the years 1988-1993. The mean scores rose dramatically in 1990, dropped significantly by 1992, and then rose even more dramatically in 1993. Language scores ranged a maximum of 6.7 points during the six year period. The 1991 literature-based basal text adoption did not affect the language means as no overall trend can be witnessed in the data (Table 4).

Study 3: ISTEP total battery scores showed no trend toward improvement during the years 1988-1993. Mean scores prior to the 1991 adoption of a literature-based basal text remained relatively stable. After the 1991 adoption, means dropped dramatically until 1993 when they rose to 62.5, the highest in the six year period. Once again, the mean scores showed no significant improvement, but merely fluctuated with no particular trend or pattern visible (Table 5).

Table 1: IQ Means

Years	Mean IQ
1988	103
1989	103
1990	101
1991	100
1992	99
1993	102

Table 2: ISTEP Scores

Years	Reading Total	Language Total	Total Battery
1988	58.1	60.5	57.9
1989	59.1	60.9	58.4
1990	57.8	64.6	60.1
1991	58.9	62.3	58.6
1992	54.3	57.9	51.6
1993	60.8	64.5	62.5

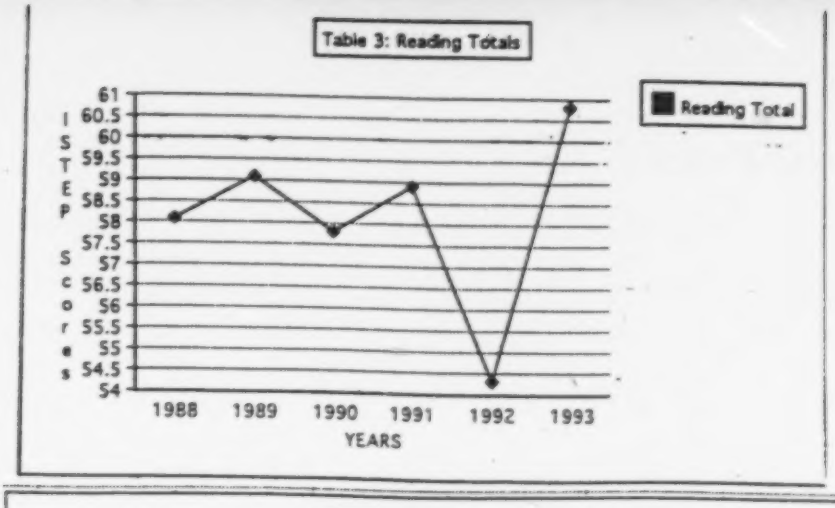
Table 3: Reading Totals
Reading Total
ISTEP Scores
61
60.5
60
59.5
59
58.5
58
57.5
57
56.5
56
55.5
55
54.5
54
1988
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
YEARS

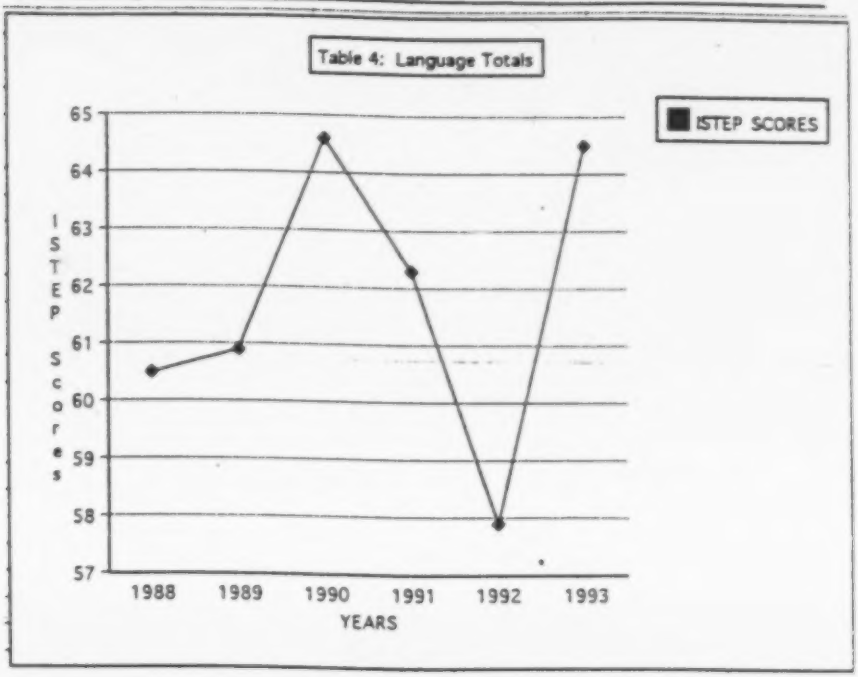
Table 4: Language Totals
ISTEP SCORES
ISTEP Scores
65
64
63
62
61
60
59
58
57
1988
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
YEARS

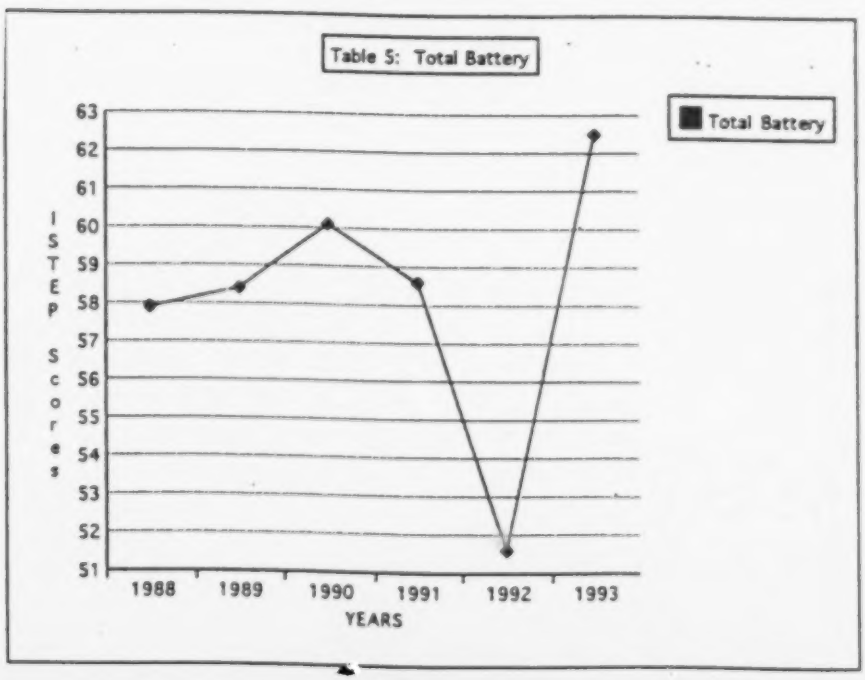
Table 5: Total Battery
Total Battery
ISTEP Scores
63
62
61
60
59
58
57
56
55
54
53
52
51
1988
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
YEARS

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The results of this study exhibit no particular trend or pattern of the mean ISTEP reading, language, and total battery scores of third graders at Terre Town Elementary for the years 1988 through 1993. After the adoption of the literature-based basal in 1991, reading mean scores did improve slightly but then fell dramatically in 1992 only to rise significantly in 1993. Both language and total battery means dropped in 1991 and again in 1992 only to rise significantly in 1993 in accordance with reading means. Because of the fluctuating nature of this data both before and after 1991, no significant improvement in test scores was witnessed and the hypothesis must be accepted. Students taught in a literature-based basal reading program achieve no significantly higher test scores that students taught in a skills-based basal program.

The nature of educational research is such that it is often confounded by extraneous variables that lead to internal invalidity. In this particular study of the effectiveness of literature-based basal reading texts other factors may have contributed to the results. Teacher attitudes, teacher expectations, and unfamiliarity with the new text materials may have affected the outcome. The results could also have been affected by student attitudes and environmental factors.

Perhaps students view a textbook as a textbook, giving little value to its individual merits as Cairney (1988) concluded in his study.

It is recommended that further studies be done to determine if literature-based basal textbooks can improve test scores in the language arts areas. A true experimental design with a control group utilizing a skills-based text and a treatment group utilizing a literature-based text might provide more internal validity. In addition, studies of teacher effectiveness in relation to attitudes about textbook materials might provide more insight on the improvement of achievement scores.

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